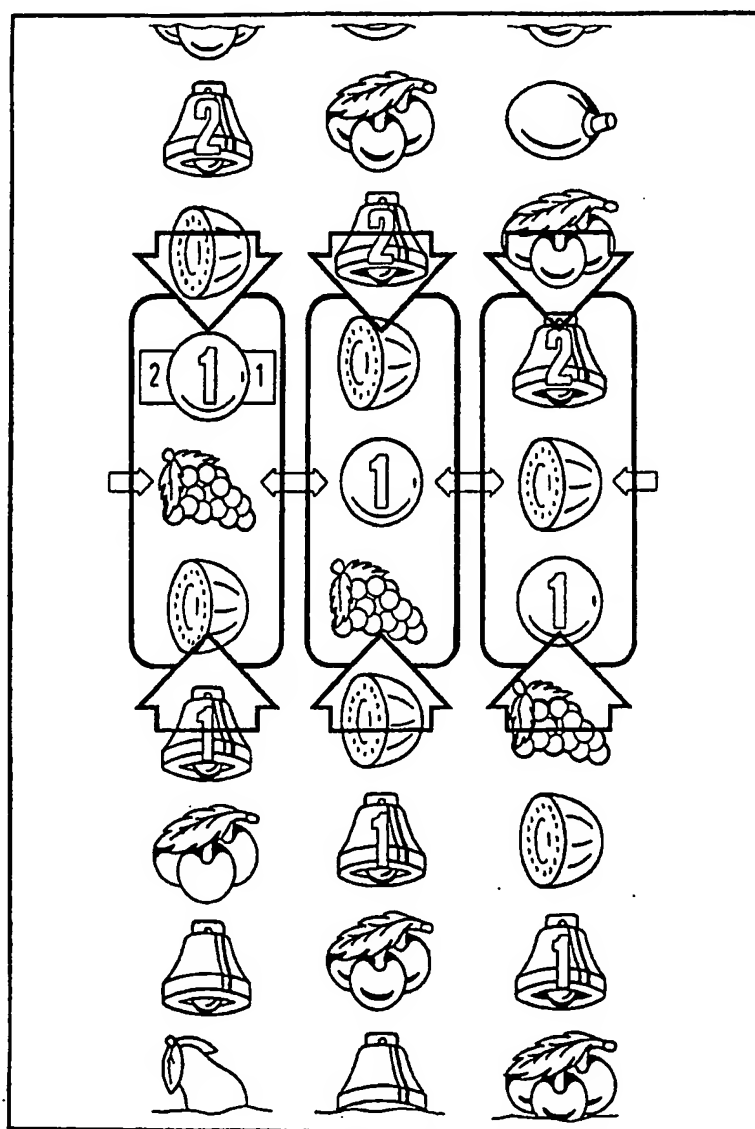


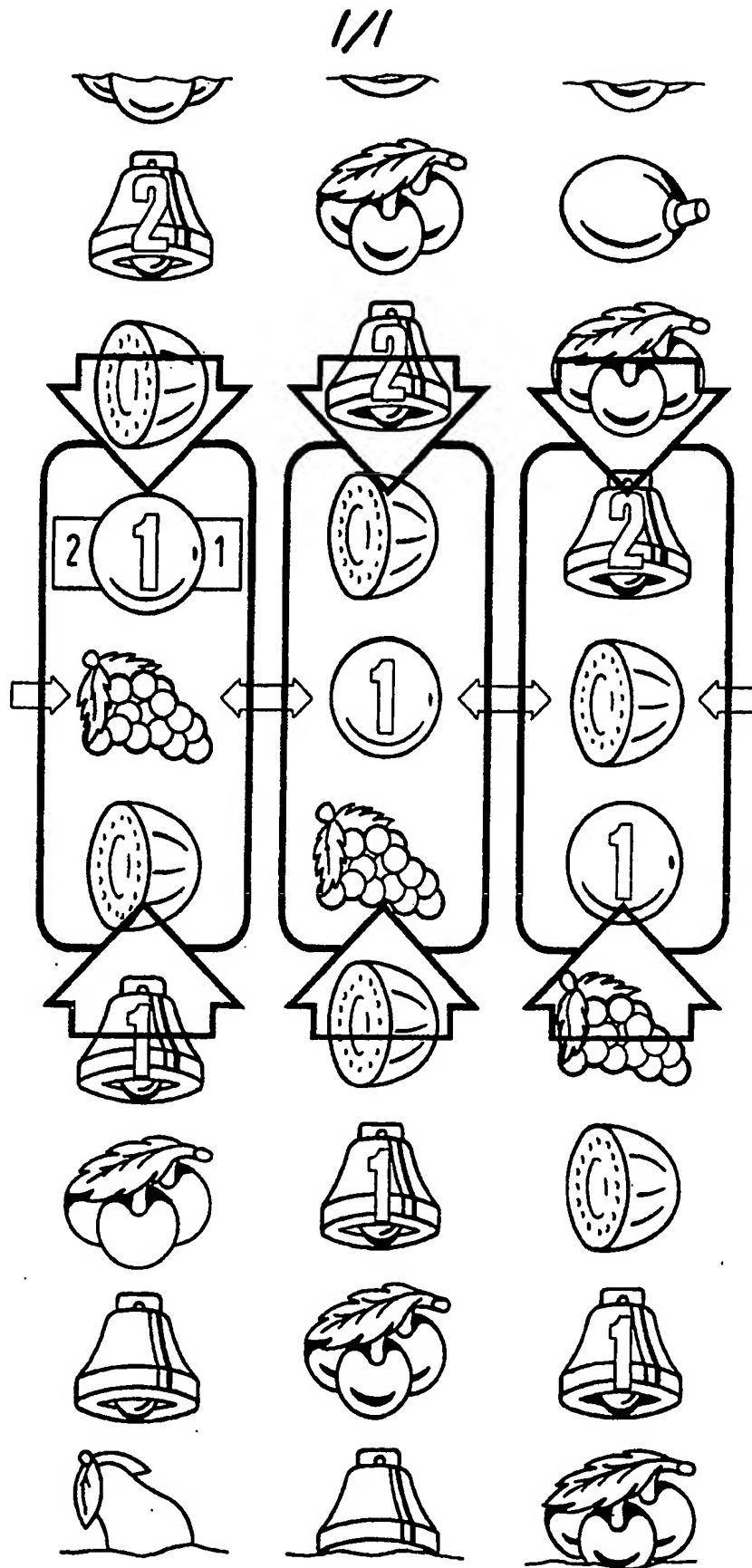
- (74) Agents
Wynne-Jones Laine and
James,
Morgan Arcade Chambers,
33 St. Mary Street,
Cardiff,
Glamorgan

(57) A fruit machine has a video display simulating mechanical reels. The number of symbols visible on each reel is usually constant for the normal reel spin, but when an adjustment feature such as nudging is

available the "windows" may enlarge above and below their normal extent to show more symbols. Thus a player can better judge how to adjust the reels. As the reels are adjusted, the windows may close up again, or cease to display symbols in the vacated positions, in order not to reveal too much of the symbol pattern.



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SPECIFICATION

Improvements relating to coin-operated gaming or amusement machines

This invention relates to coin-operated or coin-freed gaming or amusement-with-prizes machines, and the term "coin" is intended in this Specification to embrace tokens which can be obtained from the proprietor of the machine in exchange for normal money.

The invention is concerned with machines of the kind in which a series of symbols carried by rotatable drums, reels, discs or their equivalents, is displayed to view in a line. For convenience, reference will henceforth simply be made to reels. When the machine is operated by insertion of a coin, and possibly also by depression of a lever or pressing of a button or the like, the reels rotate and stop in an apparently random manner, and if the symbols in the resulting line are in a winning combination, a pay-out mechanism is operated and a prize is awarded and indicated.

In order to add to the interest of such machines it is common to add an extra 'feature' by which there is occasionally the chance of a prize being awarded for some occurrence beyond the simple arrival of the drums, after their initial spin, at a particular combination line. It has been proposed to enable the player to adjust the position of the drums by indexing them forwards (or backwards) by what has become known as a 'nudge' button. Normally the player can see the symbol in the position adjacent the combination line and can thus predict the result of the nudge adjustment. If this brings up a winning combination line then a prize is awarded. With another feature, known as a 'shuffle', the reels are moved randomly backwards or forwards before stopping again.

However, with mechanical reels and fixed windows in which part of each reel periphery is displayed, there is a limit to the number of symbols the player can see. It is the aim of this invention to allow the player an increased number of symbols to consider when he is playing the feature so that he has more positive information on which to act when nudging, shuffling or otherwise adjusting the reels.

According to the present invention there is provided a fruit machine of the kind described using equivalents to actual reels wherein the reel symbols are images on a video screen and wherein such images are confined to a first number of symbols during a first mode of play and a second number of symbols during a second mode of play.

The use of a video screen rather than mechanical reels is known and is among the "equivalents" referred to earlier.

The one mode of play may be the normal spin of the reels, while the second mode can be a feature in which one or more of the reels can be adjusted. For this feature the second number may be greater than the first; in other words, more symbols are projected onto the screen, usually both above and below those displayed during the

first mode of play. For that there may just be three symbols for each reel, the central ones providing the win line. When the feature occurs, however, the player may see two, three or more symbols above and below the win line on each reel, and if the feature allows sufficient adjustment he may be able to bring any one of them onto the win line and so secure a prize.

For a better understanding of the invention one embodiment will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawing, in which the single Figure represents the screen of a video fruit machine.

The screen has permanently marked upon it, or projected thereon, three windows 1, 2 and 3 side by side in the usual fruit machine arrangement. To add emphasis there are also arrows pointing into the windows at top and bottom.

During normal play the area of the screen outside the windows shows nothing, some neutral background or perhaps some legend or pattern that bears no relation to the fruit machine symbols as shown in the drawing. However, these symbols do appear in the windows and so the screen has a strong resemblance to a mechanical fruit machine with three reels showing in the windows three symbols each, the surround being a mask concealing other symbols on the reels.

During normal play the symbols in the windows are changed in cyclic fashion to resemble the spinning of reels, and the group ending upon the central line determines whether or not there is a prize.

At random there will be a feature in which one or more of the reels can be adjusted, either in a controlled manner as by nudging, or at random within certain limits as by shuffling. When this feature occurs the masking surround ceases to be projected and there appear further symbols above and below the windows, as if revealing a much greater extent of a mechanical reel. The player can thus see more than one symbol distance from the win line and can select his play of the feature accordingly to try to gain the best combination on a win line.

When there is such adjustment, with a mechanical reel further symbols would be brought into view and remain static. This could lead to easy determination of the symbol pattern, which could be a guide to playing the machine. With this video version, however, it is possible to leave any position vacated by a symbol blank, or to increase the masked area correspondingly. If this technique is used it would still be possible to allow reel adjustment beyond the known symbols. For example, the first four nudges could bring on visible symbols, while a fifth nudge might be a 'shot in the dark'.

As illustrated, the symbols on the reels are in identical sequence and staggered with respect of each other by one symbol position. In practice reels, or their video equivalents, are seldom if ever identical on the same machine.

Claims (Filed on 10.8.1982)

1. A fruit machine of the kind described using equivalents to actual reels, wherein the reel symbols are images on a video screen, and
5 wherein such images are confined to a first number of symbols during a first mode of play and a second number of symbols during a second mode of play.
2. A fruit machine as claimed in claim 1,
10 wherein said one mode of play is the normal spin of the reels and the second mode is a feature in which one or more reels can be adjusted.
3. A fruit machine as claimed in claim 2,
15 wherein the second number is greater than the first.
4. A fruit machine as claimed in claim 2, or claim 3, wherein the first number is three symbols for each reel.
5. A fruit machine as claimed in claim 2, claim 20 3 or claim 4, wherein in the second mode further symbols are displayed above and below those displayed in the first mode.
6. A fruit machine as claimed in any of claims 2 to 5, wherein the second mode is nudging or
25 shuffling.
7. A fruit machine as claimed in any of claims 2 to 6, wherein when a reel is adjusted, the number of symbols which that reel displays alters.
8. A fruit machine substantially as hereinbefore
30 described with reference to the accompanying drawings.